2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

chief that he must deal. If we give a present to a village it is to the village chief that we must give it'; and, 'It is when a man transgresses against his own village chief that *personal responsibility* is brought home to him. When he transgresses against another village, his own chief pays for him.'[1] The village headman accepted liability for offences committed by his villagers against members of other villages, but could punish his own villagers by fines and by putting them into slave-sticks. Within the village, according to MacDonald,

> The headman cannot make his villagers hoe his farm for him, or do such private work. Neither does he exact tribute from them. . . . Still he expects them not only to stand by him in war, but to support his government on all occasions, and to render special assistance in the trial of judicial cases. . . . He may pronounce a capital sentence, or order as large a penalty as the fine of four slaves—especially if he be a higher headman. But his judgements may be complained of by any of his free subjects (only such appeals are rare, unless by parties that want to leave his village altogether). His decision may be revised by some other headman, as the ruler of the village from which his own settlement broke off; but the ultimate appeal is to the chief of the country. While the village headman settles all smaller disputes without troubling the chief, he usually reports graver cases.[2]

The Chief and the Village Headmen: the Political Process

The village headmen in any particular area recognized the superiority of one of their number, the chief of the land (*asyene cilambo*). MacDonald classifies the headmen under one chief as follows:

1. Chief's blood relatives, usually called 'younger brother'.
2a. Settlers or refugees (*alambi*) who have come over with a large following from a hostile chief.
2b. Men who have gained the chief's favour by their services and been sent to occupy new spots in the kingdom.

'Other village headmen arise when a large village increases and sends forth smaller hamlets.'[3] All in the territory of a chief were integrated by a chain of authority. As he explains,

> 1. Headmen are under higher headmen and under the chief.

[1] MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 186. Original italics.
[2] MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 153. [3] MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 156.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

2. Free men are under their elder brother in the first instance, but they may carry their cases to the headman of their village or even to the chief of the country.
3. Slaves were entirely under their own master.[1]

The headmen's subservience to the chief is described in the following passage:

> In all public transactions the headman represents his village. He receives the chief's orders and sees them carried out. When he kills an elephant he sends one of the tusks to the chief. Should he kill twenty elephants he is not expected to give up twenty tusks—two or three would be sufficient. If he shoots a large buck he gives one haunch of venison. For all such tributes he expects to receive in return a present (generally a little powder). . . . He is expected to attend the chief's parliament unless he is under an elder brother in which case he is not allowed to speak, except when especially commissioned. Headmen are expected to report all cases of war, but they often attack enemies without telling their chief beforehand, saying, 'Let him hear of the enterprise when it succeeds.' Yet this is dangerous unless they are sure of success, and well acquainted with the chief's private sentiments. On reporting an attack they present the chief with part of the booty. In times of war each headman when summoned, must follow his chief's flag, otherwise his village is burned down, and all that fail to escape are killed or enslaved.[2]

Yet within the framework of this organization villages were markedly autonomous. MacDonald's description, which I have just quoted, brings this out very well. Elsewhere he writes: 'The chief may often have less influence than powerful headmen, and we have known cases where he simply contented himself with grumbling when his headmen acted contrary to his desire.'[3] The chief did not differ greatly from his more powerful headmen. A certain amount of ritual in terms of ancestor worship embellished his position, and he had some ascendancy over village headmen to whom he had given land. Yet, in the last analysis, the chief had to rely on his personal following and military power to subjugate headmen who were becoming too powerful. The chief was therefore in direct competition with his subject village headmen, and involved in a constant struggle with them for followers. MacDonald describes how the chief himself was a

[1] MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 155.
[2] MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 157.
[3] MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 155.